

# NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### HOLIDAY SHOPPING SCAMS: HOLIDAY GIFT CARDS

**Columbia, SC...** ...Christmas is just around the corner, and many shoppers are looking for that special gift for their loved ones. Unfortunately, the holiday shopping season is a busy time for scammers, too. In an effort to inform South Carolina consumers about holiday shopping scams this year, the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) is releasing a three-part series entitled "Holiday Shopping Scams."

#### **"Holiday Shopping Scams: Holiday Gift Cards"**

Finding the perfect gift can be a challenge, and many shoppers are finding gifts cards to be the perfect alternative. Unfortunately, some gift cards may allow scammers to spend your money without your knowledge. Simply considering where you purchase your gift card, though, may prevent you from lost dollars and a spoiled gift.

Scammers begin by stealing the account numbers off the back of gift cards before they are purchased. After copying the number, the scammer waits a few days to ensure a customer has purchased the card. Next, the scammer calls the 800 number provided on the back of the card to check the balance on the activated card. The scammer then uses the account number to purchase items, and before the buyer has time to give the gift card to friends or family, the balance is zero.

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#### **About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:**

Established by the Consumer Protection code in 1974, The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina Consumers. Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

For more information, visit [www.sconsumer.gov](http://www.sconsumer.gov).

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Shoppers should be cautious of gift cards on display in discount, convenience, and grocery stores. These public displays provide scammers a low-risk environment to steal account numbers. Gift cards purchased through specialty and department stores and restaurants, however, require the buyer to request a gift card from the cashier. The account numbers on these cards are typically a more secure option. Additionally, consumers should use cards that have PINs or other another required code before the card can be used.

Finally, shoppers should check the terms and conditions of the gift cards. A 2004 law signed by Governor Mark Sanford requires retailers to state the terms and conditions on all gift cards. Fees and value changes must also be printed clearly on the card, envelope, or its covering, or they are inapplicable. Finally, expiration dates must be printed in 10-point type and capital letters, or the card is automatically valid for one year.

“Holiday Shopping Scams: Online Shopping” will be released next week. For more information, contact the Public Information & Education Division at 803.734.4190, toll free at 1.800.922.1594, or online at [www.sccconsumer.gov](http://www.sccconsumer.gov).

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